

**LOWER GWYNEDD TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of August 16, 2023**

Present: Craig Melograno, Chairman
Rich Valiga, Vice-Chair
Maureen Nunn
Rusty Beardsley

Patty Furber, B&Z Administrator
Ed Brown, Gilmore & Associates
Chad Dixson, McMahan & Assoc.

Absent: Stephen Paccione, Danielle Porreca, Joel Mayor

Call to Order:

The meeting of the Lower Gwynedd Township Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 PM.



Approval of Minutes: June 21, 2023

A motion was made by Mr. Beardsley and seconded by Mr. Valiga to approve the minutes of the Lower Gwynedd Township Planning Commission meeting of June 21, 2023. The motion carried unanimously.



Subdivision/Land Development:

1325 Sumneytown Pike

Gwynedd Mercy University

Frances M. Maguire Healthcare Innovation Center

#23-03LD

Present for the land development application was Ms. Christen Pionzio from HRMM&L, Mr. Steven Freeman, Director of Campus Projects and Construction, Mr. George Hartman and Mr. Bill Rearden from Bohler Engineering.

Ms. Pionzio explained the proposed building will be located across from University Drive, across from the Seminary. Ms. Pionzio explained that the building will be state of the art, and the university needs to construct the proposed building in order to compete in the healthcare field. The University wants to add speech and language pathology and have a central location to collaborate. Ms. Pionzio stated that there is a great need for nurses that have a clinical requirement. Gwynedd Mercy University competes with all the other universities, so this will help them better their offerings for future students. Ms. Pionzio stated there is currently no health wellness center on campus, but this building will provide one. If someone needs to go to

the nurse, she is located in a dorm, counseling and testing centers are elsewhere on campus, all this would be included in the proposed building. Ms. Pionzio stated that enrollment has decreased tremendously and the university is hoping to get back to the pre-2019 enrollment numbers. Ms. Pionzio stated that having cutting-edge offerings is necessary for the university to thrive. Ms. Pionzio stated the campus began in 1948, their core values are the earth, with great outreach to the community, that includes Catherine's Cupboard's, which provides food and security to the students. Ms. Pionzio showed the board members a slideshow of the architectural renderings of the future building, which includes 3,500 sq. feet with access to the front and back of the building. There will be parking in front, adjacent to the building. The building will have multi-purpose rooms that include walls that open up together to equal 4,500 sq. feet that open to a patio in the back.

Ms. Pionzio stated they will comply with all the review letters, except for the waivers. Ms. Pionzio stated the concrete tire bumpers and curb stops prevent vehicle overhang; she stated that the sidewalks are 8' feet in width and there is enough room for overhang. She stated they like to stay away from the bumpers and curb stops because of trip hazards. Ms. Pionzio stated that the waiver for the 10' curb island at the end of each parking grove, that landscape islands are provided within the existing parking areas, but curbing is not provided. Mr. Hartman stated that the waiver is to stay consistent with a lot of other areas on campus that do not have curbing throughout. Ms. Pionzio stated they are asking for a waiver from the Traffic Impact Study, she stated they are hoping to get back to an increase in enrollment and feels there won't be any added traffic. Ms. Pionzio stated that Montgomery County Planning Commission review letter dated July 6, 2023; pointed out that they like all the trail systems to have pedestrian connectivity. Ms. Pionzio stated that they added pedestrian connections to the three buildings that lead to the main hub of the proposed building. She stated they added landscaping and trail connections with sidewalks to stay consistent with what they are doing with the campus.

Mr. Dixon stated that he wanted to clarify that they are asking for a waiver from the Traffic Impact Study and not the Traffic Impact Fee. He stated that considering the decline in enrollment, it's worth considering. Mr. Dixon stated that he requested trip generation information for the proposed facility which can allow them to compare that to the drop in enrollment. Mr. Melograno wanted to know what the hope would be for this to increase enrollment. Mr. Freeman stated that they would hope to add at least 100 more students, but felt that the university will never go back to the pre-pandemic numbers. They realize they have to do something to encourage enrollment. Mr. Melograno wanted to know if they did do the traffic study and what would be the action items be. Mr. Dixon stated it would be very similar to the Seminary project where the study was done on the Evans/Sumneytown intersections. Mr. Dixon stated it could be the same result. Mr. Melograno wanted to know when the Seminary study was done and was the assumption of lesser enrollment taken into consideration. Mr. Dixon stated he would go back and look at the Seminary study, the trip generation information that they provided, and do an assessment based on that information if they did do a traffic study. Mr. Melograno wanted to know if the board was OK with the waiver and if McMahan would do an analysis on their own. Mr. Dixon stated McMahan would take a closer look to give the board a recommendation. Mr. Valiga wanted to know the percentage of commuters vs. resident students. Mr. Freeman stated they have 250 resident students, 1,150 commuter students. Mr. Valiga wanted to know what the past numbers were. Mr. Freeman stated back in 2019 when they had Alexandra Hall, they had around 500

resident students and 1,800 commuter students. Mr. Freeman stated they have more students now that take online courses which is one of the reasons, they sold Alexandra Hall. Mr. Melograno stated that the Seminary traffic study would be more meaningful pre-pandemic. Ms. Pionzio stated they can get the pre-2019 numbers from the Seminary.

Ms. Nunn wanted to know if there would be any trail connections for the residents at Parsons Ln. Mr. Freeman stated that part of their 2016 land development was to connect the trail on Sunnyside Pike back down to the walkways of the university, and the extension of the university drive trail to Evans Rd. Mr. Freeman stated that they have a lot of people that cross over Evans and pick up the trail at the new entrance. Mr. Freeman showed the board the area of proposed new walkways and trails for the project that were outlined in blue. Mr. Valiga requested a plan of the trail system to be added to their plan set.

Mr. Melograno wanted to know about the parking and stated that there seems to be a lot of spots. Mr. Freeman stated he felt the parking spots are needed for events, and that there's not enough parking at the other buildings which are further away. Mr. Freeman stated they are trying to make it easier for accessibility as well. Mr. Melograno wanted to know if they are proposing more than required to provide. Mr. Hartman stated that the total parking spaces would be 290 and the required number was 161. Mr. Melograno stated that is a big difference. Ms. Pionzio stated that the parking is serving more purposes than just the proposed building. Mr. Beardsley stated that he felt it was a nice balance for the campus since it would reduce the amount of traffic on campus. Mr. Melograno requested that the parking be phased in two steps. Mr. Freeman stated they would consider that. Mr. Freeman stated that at Maguire Hall there really isn't any parking for students, just faculty. Mr. Freeman stated that the proposed complex would let the students utilize the new parking area, but will look into the phasing. Mr. Hartman stated that he wanted to clarify that they are adding 168 new spaces and 141 are required, which is fairly close. Mr. Melograno stated that since they are adding more parking spaces than required, there would be a half-acre of trees that would be removed. Ms. Pionzio stated that the trees would probably be taken down anyway, but would take a look.

Ms. Pionzio stated they have 5,900 caliper inches of tree removal. Ms. Pionzio stated that the university has a science department to help look at the environmental impact of removing the trees and how to mitigate it. Ms. Pionzio informed the board that they came up with some ideas they have planned regarding the impact of the tree removal and wanted to get the board's opinion. Ms. Pionzio stated that they will go around campus to see where else they could do tree replacement, they could plant larger trees instead of 3" caliper trees, they could combine bushes with trees, and go beyond plantings by looking into adding EV charging stations, looking at the structure of the roof for possible solar panels, adding solar arrays in the parking areas, adding an orchard to plant different trees to provide fruit for Catherine's Cupboard. Ms. Pionzio stated she wanted to reach out to the Wissahickon Trails and discuss the trail system with them and would like to incorporate their ideas to put together an array of different options they could do to mitigate the impact instead of paying the fee-in-lieu. Ms. Pionzio stated this will take some time and will be back once a plan is in place. Mr. Melograno stated that he felt it's important that the university needs to come up with a way to explain how removing almost 6,000 caliper inches of trees is good for the environment. Mr. Melograno stated this is going to be a health building that he expects Gwynedd Mercy to be a leader in the environment. Mr. Melograno wanted to know

how this proposed building will replace the environmental impact of removing all these trees. Ms. Pionzio stated if they get creative enough it will be better putting into the environment than paying a fee-in-lieu. Mr. Hartman stated that their landscape architect walked the site and there are a lot of dying/diseased ash trees. Mr. Beardsley stated that there is a fire hazard there with all the dying/diseased ash trees and it would be a much healthier area at the end of this. Ms. Pionzio stated that they will explore all these options that she mentioned; she is going to see if any grant money would be available as well. Mr. Valiga wanted to know about the Montgomery County Planning Commission's comments regarding planting the Pin Oak's along the pedestrian pathway because of the branching habit. Mr. Freeman stated they would look into that.

Ms. Nunn, who is also a liaison with the EAC (Environmental Advisory Committee), informed Ms. Pionzio of the "Going Green Award" that recognizes sustainability initiatives and that the university should apply because they like to reward good activity.

Mr. Melograno stated they will come back to look at the trees and parking next time. Ms. Pionzio stated they will come back with the pre-covid 2019 traffic study, provide the trail on the overall site plan, look at the parking numbers and phasing, and all the ideas for the tree removal. Once all these items are obtained, the applicant will return to the P.C.



**727 Norristown Rd. LP
Building 14 & Electric Substation**

#23-04LD

Present for the land development application was Ms. Christen Pionzio from HRMM&L, Mr. Dan Fuchs from Cushman & Wakefield, Mr. Jason Rascoe from Beacon Capital Partners, Mr. Bill Rearden and Mr. Will Jager from Bohler Engineering.

Ms. Pionzio stated that MRA was the previous owner and a lot has changed since 2019. MRA had a proposal for a conference center, hotel and restaurant on the property which required a text amendment and conditional use approval. Ms. Pionzio stated there were appeals for the preliminary land development, a lot of neighbor opposition and there was a court settlement agreement. Ms. Pionzio stated that there were all types of road improvements within that settlement agreement. MRA is gone, the hotel, conference center and restaurant are gone. Ms. Pionzio stated that Beacon is life sciences, they deal with high-tech laboratories with highly educated employees on the campus. Ms. Pionzio stated that Beacon held up the pedestrian improvements on McKean Road that MRA promised to complete. Ms. Pionzio stated that Beacon felt obligated to do the pedestrian crossings as a step forward to being part of the community.

Ms. Pionzio stated that the applicant is looking to install a parking lot for Building 14, and an electric substation. She stated there is a significant electrical demand on the property and they need dual electric sources in case one fails, the backup is there. Ms. Pionzio stated there will be

future development and they will be back in the future, but for now, this is just a small project they are looking at.

Mr. Rascoe explained to the board that Beacon took full ownership of the property last year. Mr. Rascoe stated that they liked what they saw at the site, liked the community and thought that the campus fit well within the community. Mr. Rascoe stated that Beacon is a private family-owned company that has been in business for over 75 years. Mr. Rascoe showed slides of the pedestrian improvements that were completed which included a speed monitor, which is not currently powered (PECO should be powering next week). Mr. Rascoe stated that the concrete island that was installed at the YMCA intersection will be removed next week. He stated that was a PennDOT requirement, but they have been receiving complaints about difficulty turning around it. Ms. Nunn stated that the island does slow down traffic and that it did help.

Mr. Rascoe showed a slideshow of the current campus improvements that have been completed so far which include a renovation of the old barn that is now a multi-purpose space for tenants such as Merck, Organon and Roquette. Mr. Rascoe stated that Beacon pursues LEED Certified buildings and looks for sustainability measures with all the properties they own.

Mr. Fuchs stated this is a pretty limited project which includes a new substation with 34 new parking spaces to support Building 14. Mr. Fuchs stated that there are a lot of power outages at the campus, with at least 4 power outages per year. Mr. Fuchs stated they want to bring power from two different power sources to provide for the life science tenants who need it for their research and development. Mr. Fuchs stated the new parking spaces will support Building 14 with EV charging stations throughout the campus. Mr. Fuchs stated the new infrastructure is an underground duct bank which is closer to McKean Rd. and resulted in a few trees being removed during the construction. Mr. Fuchs stated they submitted a tree replacement plan that reflects the replacement of 420 caliper inches (48 new trees) along McKean Rd. Mr. Fuchs stated that they intend to supplement some of the buffering along McKean Rd. by adding additional trees further north to buffer the campus even more than it is today. Mr. Fuchs stated the trees will be native, planting heights will be between 8' - 12' when planted; mature size will be approximately 12' - 60' feet in height.

Ms. Pionzio discussed the waivers, she stated that they are looking for the waiver along the frontages, curb, sidewalks, and the ultimate-right-away dedication along McKean and Norristown Roads since it's internal to the site, just a parking lot. Ms. Nunn asked about the signage on the campus. She explained that it's very confusing going in there and that it's important to have correct signage installed, especially for emergency vehicles. Mr. Rascoe agreed and stated that is a point of focus for them.

Mr. Melograno wanted to know why they needed the parking lot. Mr. Fuchs stated they want to make sure there is parking in the right location that's convenient to the buildings. Mr. Fuchs stated there would be 237 parking spaces for 106,000 sq. feet of gross space for office and lab tenants. Mr. Melograno stated that is technically more than required. Mr. Fuchs stated it's probably more than maybe 40 spaces required.

Ms. Pionzio stated that there is conditional use approval required for the stormwater management facilities within the wetland or buffer area. This condition is listed in the Gilmore review letter dated August 11, 2023. Ms. Pionzio requested that the conditional use be included in tonight's discussion, and would apply for the conditional use afterward. Ms. Pionzio stated the grade isn't there to move the stormwater facilities; there is an 18" pipe and endwall. Mr. Reardon stated that they couldn't move it, and in order to drain it, they would have to cross the buffer into the wetlands. Mr. Brown stated it's a very minimal disturbance and that Gilmore doesn't foresee any issues. Mr. Brown stated that Wissahickon Turf Fields had the same issue. Ms. Pionzio stated that she would like to get the conditional use approval tonight instead of coming back next month, so she can just go to the Board of Supervisors. Mr. Melograno stated there haven't been any written reviews distributed or a formal application submitted. Mr. Reardon stated that coming back next month wouldn't change anything. Ms. Pionzio stated that she would come back, but wanted to try and save a trip. The board members took that into consideration and made the following recommendations.

A motion was made by Mr. Beardsley to recommend this land development application for approval by the Board of Supervisors, seconded by Mr. Valiga with the following recommendation:

- The applicant is to comply with all review letters except for the waivers that are outlined in the Bohler letter dated August 16, 2023

The motion passed with a 4-0 vote.

A motion was made by Mr. Melograno to recommend the forthcoming conditional use application for approval by the Board of Supervisors, seconded by Mr. Beardsley with the following recommendation:

- The board recommends the approval of the forthcoming conditional use application as long as it doesn't change the current impact on the wetland buffer as shown on the current plans.

The motion passed with a 4-0 vote.



ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 P.M.
Respectfully submitted,
Patty Furber, Secretary